

Do Jewish People Really Need Jesus?
McLean Bible Church
Lon Solomon
February 1, 2004

Hey, we're glad you came! How about opening a Bible with me to Acts chapter 20? We're going to continue in our study of the life of the great man, the apostle Paul. Now if you've been here the last few weeks, you know we've been talking from Acts chapter 20 about Paul's speech he gave the leaders of the church of Ephesus. In that speech, the apostle Paul outlined the five spiritual principles that defined his life and shaped his ministry and made him the man of God that he was. I've been telling you over the last few weeks that if you aspire to be a man of God, a woman of God, a true servant of God, then this little speech is the most significant section of the Bible anywhere for you and me. If we can emulate these principles that Paul had in his life, that's how we get to be the kind of servant of Christ that he was. Now if you missed any of these, I encourage you to pick up the tape or CD; we're going to move on today.

I want us to look at verse 21, right in the middle of this speech. It was a verse that we kind of glossed over when we looked at it the first time, but I want us to go back and really dig in with it. Here's what it says. "Both publicly and house to house, I declared to Gentiles and Jewish people alike that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Now friends, earlier in the speech, the apostle Paul had said that he wanted these leaders of the church at Ephesus to "shepherd God's flock and protect them from theological error." I take that responsibility very seriously here at McLean Bible Church; our leaders do. So what I want to do for a couple weeks is stop and look at some of the most insidious theological errors that are being pushed and fostered on the American people today. This is one of them right here, what we've just read in verse 21.

You may not realize it, but there's an enormous conflict going on in the Christian community today about this very question: do Jewish people really need to believe in Jesus as their Messiah? Do Jewish people really need to embrace what Jesus did for them on the cross in order to go to heaven? A large majority of the Christian community these days is saying, "No, they don't." Here are a few examples. The Christian

Scholars Group on Jewish-Christian Relations is a group of religious leaders from the Lutheran church, the Methodist church, the Episcopalian church and other Protestant denominations. They published a statement in September of 2002, and here's what it said. "In view of our conviction that Jews are already in an eternal covenant with God, we renounce all missionary efforts directed at converting Jews."

The U. S. Catholic bishops, in a statement entitled "Reflections On Covenant and Mission," released in August of 2002 said, "Targeting Jews for conversion to Christianity is no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic church."

When Jews for Jesus was over in London this past summer, the summer of 2003, doing campaign—campaign means we're out on the street with tens and tens of volunteers passing out tracts to Jewish people, trying to talk to Jewish people about Christ—the archbishop of Canterbury released a statement in which he said, "The campaign by Jews for Jesus represents an approach to Christian witness which neither I nor the wider Church of England can endorse."

You say, "What in the world is going on, Lon?" Well, let me tell you what's going on, friends. There is a very smooth public relations job that's being done by the people in the Jewish community, by Jewish leaders. It's been done over the past thirty years, and it's aimed at trying to convince the Christian community that as Abraham's seed, as Abraham's descendant, Jewish people have their own unique arrangement with God, completely apart from Jesus Christ. They don't need Jesus Christ, so therefore it is unnecessary for us to share Jesus Christ with them or evangelize them. This is commonly referred to as the "two-covenant theory," which says that God made one covenant with the Jewish people through Abraham. God made a different covenant with Gentiles through Jesus Christ. Because we have our own covenant with Abraham, we don't need Jesus Christ; we don't have to accept Jesus Christ. Going to hell and needing a Savior is a Gentile problem; it is not a Jewish problem.

This is why I said, in the *Washington Times* earlier this month—I'm quoting me now (laughs)—"I am deeply concerned about the growing tendency in evangelical Christian circles to accept the idea that Jewish people have a separate arrangement with God than Gentiles and that Jewish people, therefore, don't need personal faith in Jesus as their Messiah to go to heaven." I continued, "Twenty years ago, professors at

Fuller Seminary in California were preaching this. Back then it was an extremely tangential position, but it has gained an unbelievable following now. The slippage has been significant.”

This is what we want to talk about today. Do Jewish people really need to believe in Jesus as their Messiah and as their Savior in order to have eternal life and go to heaven? This is part one of a three- or four-part series I’m going to break and do here called “Modern Theological Myths,” because this is a myth. I’m going to talk to you about some other myths.

Friends, this is a critical issue that goes way beyond Jewish people, and let me tell you why. If there’s another way for Jewish people to get to heaven outside Christ, then how do we know there’s not another way for Muslims to get to heaven? How do we know there’s not another way for Hindus to get to heaven or another way for good secular Americans who recycle to get to heaven apart from Jesus Christ? Once there’s a crack in this door, there might as well be a thousand. This issue is central to the integrity of everything we understand about how to get eternal life and how to get to heaven.

So let’s talk about this. Now before we answer the question whether Jewish people really need Christ, let me give you a little background to the relationship of the Christian community and reaching out to Jewish people with the message of Christ. For the first nineteen centuries of the church’s existence, the dominant theological position of the church said that God had disinherited Israel from all the promises that He made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David; that God had given those promises to the church instead; that the church had essentially become Israel in the mind of God; and that therefore, in light of this theological position, Jewish people were nothing more than a sad group of people who had rejected and killed their Messiah. Because of this theology, as you might imagine, there were virtually no missionary outreaches to Jewish people at all in the first nineteen centuries of the church’s existence.

All of that changed at the beginning of the twentieth century with the emergence of dispensationalism--or the re-emergence, I might add—as the theological force in Christianity. One of the basic tenets of dispensationalism is that Israel and the church are distinct and separate entities in the plan of God, that God has not disinherited Israel,

that the church has not become Israel, and that God intends to fulfill every promise He made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the Jewish people. Because of dispensationalism, many preachers in the early 1900's began to preach that the political nation of Israel was going to be reborn, that millions of Jews were going to return to their land in preparation for God keeping His promises, that Hebrew was once again going to be heard in the streets of Jerusalem, and that the barren deserts of Palestine would once again bloom.

People called these preachers crazy. They said, "What are you, crazy?" At the beginning of the 1900's, the Jewish people were scattered in ghettos all over the world. They were a disenfranchised and a powerless people. The Ottoman Empire owned the land of Palestine; they didn't want any Jews there, and they didn't let any Jews come there. But World War I changed all this. It began with a man named Arthur Balfour (sounded like). Arthur Balfour was a committed follower of Christ. He had been Prime Minister of Britain before the war. After the war in 1917, he authored the Balfour Declaration. This was a document pledging British support for Palestine to become a national homeland for the Jewish people.

Of course, next was Woodrow Wilson, who was also a committed follower of Christ and President of the United States. He insisted that the newly formed League of Nations after World War I endorse and approve the Balfour Declaration, which they did. This was the first time in twenty centuries that there was international recognition of the fact that Palestine belonged to the Jewish people and should be their homeland.

Finally in 1948, the saga concludes with Harry Truman. In 1948 the United Nations made the modern state of Israel and brought it into existence. War broke out with all the Arab nations vowing to push every Jew in Israel into the Mediterranean Sea. A group of evangelical Christians, pastors and Christian leaders, went to see Harry Truman in the White House. They took the Bible and showed him from the Bible how God had predicted that the Jewish people would survive, how He had predicted the nation would be reborn. They convinced Harry Truman that what was happening right in front of his eyes was prophecy coming true. As a result, Harry Truman became the first leader of any nation to recognize the state of Israel in 1948. We became the first

country to recognize the state of Israel, and as a result, the modern state of Israel survived.

Friends, what you've seen today and in our lifetime is a modern political miracle. No other people in history have ever been separated from their homeland for nineteen centuries and even survived. No other people in history have ever gotten their homeland back after being separated from it for 1900 years. No other language in history has ever died out as a living spoken language and then been revived as a living spoken language, except for Hebrew, which you'll hear today in the streets all over Israel.

You say, "Lon, how can we explain this kind of modern political miracle?" Very simply, friends. God isn't finished with the Jewish people yet. He hasn't disenfranchised them. He hasn't disinherited them. He hasn't taken away their promises and abandoned them. Rather, God is going to keep every promise He ever made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the Jewish people. He's put the nation of Israel back together as a prelude for doing that.

Let me just pause here and make one observation. We should recognize that Israel's greatest friends through this entire political process, and even today, has been and still is Bible-believing followers of Jesus Christ. That's what Balfour was. That's what Wilson was. That's what the lobbyists were who went to see Harry Truman. Friends, you cannot read the Bible, and you cannot walk with Jesus Christ and be anti-Semitic. The two are mutually exclusive. You can't do it.

Now one of the other things that happened in the twentieth century as a result of all this political activity and this theological activity is that all of a sudden, the way the church looked at Jewish people began to change. We began to understand that we ought to reach out to Jewish people with the message of Christ; we ought to try to bring them to Christ. They have a future in the plan of God. So Jewish missionary organizations, which had never existed for 1900 years, began to spring up at the beginning of the twentieth century. There are many of them today.

In the beginning our success was minimal, but in the last thirty years, the success of Jewish missionary organizations has been phenomenal. Friends, you may not realize it, but there are more Jewish believers alive and walking the face of the earth

today than at any other time since the days of the apostles, since Peter and James and John and Paul walked the face of the earth. When I came to Washington in 1971, there were not 100 Jewish believers in the entire city of Washington, D.C. Today we have almost 200 Jewish believers in this church alone. In thirty years, we have doubled the amount that were in the whole Washington area. (applause)

This is why the Jewish lobby and why the Jewish leaders have embarked upon this public relations campaign, this two-covenant theory. They were losing the war of trying to keep Jewish people from coming to Christ. They were losing the battle of trying to keep Jewish people from embracing Jesus, so they decided to change tactics and instead to convince the Christian community not to share Christ with them because they don't need Him. They said, "Hey, you know what? We're the chosen people. We have our own unique relationship with God. We don't need Jesus. We don't want Jesus, so you need to respect us and keep Jesus to yourself. God would want you to be respectful. God would want you to be courteous. It's disrespectful for you to share Jesus with us. We don't need Him. We don't want Him. Keep Him to yourself." That's how we got to where we are today. They've had amazing success, as you've seen from some of the quotes I've shared with you at the beginning, convincing us that they're fine the way they are.

Now are the Jewish people fine the way they are? What does it really mean to be the chosen people? Does that mean they're okay without Jesus Christ? Well, nobody argues that God chose the Jewish people to be His unique people in a way He's never chosen another race. Nobody argues with that. Catholics don't. Evangelical Christians don't. Jewish people don't. We all agree. In Deuteronomy 7 Moses says, "The Lord has chosen you out of all the peoples of the earth to be His special people, His treasured possession." We all agree with that.

The question is what exactly did God choose the Jewish people for? When we say they're the chosen people, does that mean God chose them for automatic salvation, that God chose them for automatic eternal life in heaven apart from Christ, that they don't need what Jesus did for them on the cross? Is that what it means to be the chosen people? Well, let's answer that. In Romans 9, Paul tells us what it means to be the chosen people. Here's what he says in verse 4. He says, "Theirs is the divine

glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs”—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—“and from those men is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah who is God overall.” There are three things here that God tells us through Paul that He chose the Jewish people for. Number one, He chose the Jewish people to give the Scriptures, the Bible, the written Word of God, to the world. “Theirs is the receiving of the law,” Paul said. Friends, I’m sure you realize that apart from the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, every other book in the Bible was written by Jewish people. I hope you understand that until the church began, for the fifteen centuries before that, the care and preservation of the Bible was exclusively the responsibility of the Jewish people. They were chosen to be the conduit through which God gave the Bible to our world.

The second thing God chose the Jewish people for is to give a true knowledge of God to our world. “Theirs is the divine glory, the covenant, the temple worship and the promises” of God. Israel was the channel God used to reveal to the human race His nature, His person, His glory, His promises, how He wanted to be worshipped.

Third, God chose the Jewish people to give the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, to our world in His human lineage. “Theirs are the patriarchs, and from those men is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah.”

Now here’s the essential point. Notice that in spite of all of these great privileges God gave the Jewish people and all these entitlements, being the chosen people never meant automatic personal salvation for every Jewish person. The Bible doesn’t say that. It never meant that every Jewish person, because they were descendants of Abraham, was automatically guaranteed to go to heaven. The Bible never says that; that is never what it meant to be part of the chosen people. And yet this misunderstanding goes all the way back to the days of Christ. There were Jewish people in the days of Jesus who had the same misunderstanding that because they were Abraham’s descendants, they were going to heaven automatically.

Remember John the Baptist? He went out in Luke 3 and called Jewish people to repent. He called Jewish people to believe in Christ. He said this to them, “Don’t say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ because that’s not going to work. That doesn’t exempt you. You still need to repent, and you still need to believe in Jesus.”

See, friends, this two-covenant idea is not something new. It goes all the way back to the time of Jesus Himself.

But the Bible is clear. Nobody gets eternal life. Nobody gets into heaven just because they're physical descendants of Abraham. Jesus said to the Jewish rabbi, Nicodemus, in John chapter 3, "You must be born again, or you're not seeing heaven." Jesus said to the Jewish disciples in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. Nobody gets to heaven unless they come by way of me." Peter said to the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 4, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we can be delivered."

The whole argument of the book of Romans, the whole first eleven chapters of Romans, is all about this issue of Jewish people and how they get to heaven. Paul says in Romans 3:9, "We have already proved that God sees Jews and Gentiles alike, that they're all under sin." Many of you have memorized Romans 3:23, which says that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Paul says, "You know what? God says that everybody has the same problem, and as a result, everybody needs the same solution, Jews and Gentiles alike." Romans 10 says, "If we confess with our mouths that Jesus Christ is Lord and we believe in our hearts God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved, for there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. The same Lord is Lord of all, and He richly blesses all who will call upon His name through Jesus Christ."

Let's summarize. Friends, it doesn't matter whether you're Jewish, whether you're Gentile, whether you're animal, vegetable or mineral. Friends, it doesn't matter whether you're descended from Abraham or Billy Graham; it doesn't make any difference. The Bible is clear that for a person to go to heaven, we've got to embrace Jesus as Messiah. We've got to trust what He did for us on the cross to pay for our wrongdoing. That's the only way to do it. As Peter said, "There is no other name under heaven by which we can get eternal life and get into heaven."

Now, we want to stop and ask our most important question at this point. Some of you looked a little glazed over. Are you guys all right? I mean, I've thrown a lot at you this morning. Everybody okay? Are you awake? All right, here we go. This is our most important question; you know what it is. One, two, three—SO WHAT? Right. You say,

“Lon, so what? Okay, okay, I stayed awake for most of that, but so what? What difference does any of that make?” Well here’s the difference. Here’s the “so what,” friends. The “so what” is that every Jewish person you know—your doctor, your dentist, your lawyer (laughter)—every one of these people you know, I’m here to tell you, you can look at them and be certain that they do not have a different arrangement with God than you have to get to heaven. They do not have an alternate way to get eternal life that bypasses Jesus Christ any more than you do. Friends, these people really, really need you to share Jesus with them, because it’s the only hope they’ve got.

You say, “Lon, I kind of sniffed out that was where you were going with this.” Well, you’re right. You say, “But you know, Lon, I don’t share Jesus with Jewish people, and I’ll tell you why. I’ve got some good reasons.” I’d like to hear them. You say, “Lon, I’ve got four.” All right, what are they? You say, “Reason number one is that I’m a Gentile. I’m not Jewish, and it seems to me that when you talk about Jewish people coming to Christ, it ought to be like a kosher on kosher deal. (laughter) Do you understand what I’m saying? I’m not kosher, and I don’t really think I’m the right person to do this.”

Well, you know, it would surprise you to know that the vast majority of followers of Christ that are Jewish today are followers of Christ primarily because of the influence of a Gentile in their life, not another Jewish person. Hey, the man who led me to Jesus Christ on the streets of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Bob Eckhart, was as Gentile as a ham and cheese sandwich, if you understand what I’m saying. (laughter) This man wouldn’t have known a matzo ball if he’d fallen over it on the street. (laughter) And yet this man led me to Christ. Friends, statistics don’t support that it’s got to be a kosher on kosher thing. If you’re here and you’re Gentile, you are a perfect candidate to share Jesus Christ with Jewish people, because most Jewish people who come to Christ do so because a Gentile shared with them.

You say, “All right, okay. So Lon, I’ve got another reason. My second reason is that I don’t know the Bible well enough to be talking to Jewish people about the Bible. I just think they’ll eat me up.” What, are you kidding? Are you kidding? Friends, if you’re a follower of Christ who attends McLean Bible Church, you know twenty times more about the Bible than the average Jewish person. I remember when I was sharing Christ

with my dad before he became a believer. We sat down once, and I took the Bible and said, "Now, Dad, I want to share something with you out of Isaiah chapter 53." He went, "Nope, nope, nope! Stop right there. I don't believe the New Testament." (laughter) I said, "Dad, Isaiah is in the Old Testament. Look here, and I'll show you right here in the index, it's in the Old Testament." He was like, "Really?" I'm like, "Yeah." He said, "Oh, okay." (laughter) If you know Isaiah's in the Old Testament, you know more than the average Jewish person. (laughter) I'm telling you the truth. We go to synagogue and sit there and learn rote prayers and rote things to go through the service, but we don't know the Bible. You know the Bible much better than we do, so don't live in some kind of false intimidation that "oh my gosh, to share with a Jewish person . . ." Friends, that's a straw man; you know the Bible much better than they do.

You say, "Well, Lon, I've got a third reason. My third reason is that Jewish people aren't going to listen anyway. You know what the Bible says about Jews. It says you're stubborn, hardheaded and stiff-necked, and you people aren't going to listen anyway, so why in the world do I want to even waste my time sharing with you people? You people aren't going to listen." Well, I admit that sharing with Jewish people can sometimes be a challenge.

I was in New York a few years ago on campaign with Jews for Jesus. I had a big T-shirt on that said "Jews for Jesus" all over the front of it. I was standing right outside the Empire State Building on 34th Street in New York giving out tracts. This little Jewish man came up to me. He was about three foot nothing; do you understand what I'm saying? (laughter) He put his hands on his hips, looked up at me and said, "So who do you think you are?" I looked down at him and said, "I'm a Jewish person who believes in Jesus." He said, "No, you're not." I said, "I'm not?" He said, "No, you're not." I said, "What am I then?" He said, "You are a figment of my imagination." (laughter) No, I'm serious! He said, "You're not real. You don't even exist. You're not even here. I'm just seeing you, and you're a figment of my imagination. You don't even exist." I said, "Well, stand here for a minute and talk to me, and I'll convince you I exist." He said, "No." He walks up the street, looking the other way, going, "Figment! You're a figment! You're a figment of my imagination! You're a figment. You don't exist. You're not real. You're a figment." He screamed that all the way up the street. (laughter) Okay, Jewish

people can be hard to reach, I admit. (laughter) But you know what? The Bible doesn't say to go out in the world and share Christ with people that are easy to reach; it says to go out in the world and share Christ with everybody. Friends, we're not allowed to decide who's easy to reach and who isn't and discriminate who we share the Lord with. We have a responsibility and a charge to share Him with everybody. I charge you with that responsibility just like God has charged me.

You say, "Well, Lon, I've got a fourth and final thing here. Can I be really honest? This is the real reason, and that is I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to talk to a Jewish person. I feel completely unequipped and completely untrained." Oooh, not to worry. We've got something for you! (laughter) Coming to town this summer is a thing we call "Behold Your God," BYG for short. You say, "What is that?" Well, it's a campaign that we're running as Jews for Jesus; you know I'm on their board. It's a five-year program where we're trying to have a one-month campaign, like where you go out on the streets, give out tracts and stand there in your Jews for Jesus shirt, in every city in the world that has at least 25,000 Jewish people. We're about three years into this. We've already done Portland, Seattle, Toronto, London, Paris, several cities in Germany, Russia, South Africa, and we're coming to Washington this summer.

For the last two weeks of August and the first two weeks of September, we're going to try to put hundreds of volunteers on the streets of Washington and Baltimore to hand out information and tell Jewish people what nobody else has the courage to tell them, and that is that they need Jesus Christ. We want you to be part of that. I want you to take a week off work and come out on the streets with me, because I'm going out there. We're going to do this together. We're going to shake, rattle, and roll the Jewish community of this city; they ain't never seen anything like this before. I'm happy to announce that we're the host church. I'm proud to be the host church; I want to be the host church. We're going to offer some training here this spring for people who are willing to volunteer and do this with us about how to share Christ with Jewish people, so if you don't know and feel untrained, all I'm telling you is to keep your eye on the bulletin. We're going to be offering training here. You come to the training run by Jews

for Jesus staff, and we'll teach you how to do this. It's not that hard. That's not an excuse that's going to hold up.

Let me summarize. The Jewish people may be the chosen people when it comes to giving the world the Scriptures and the true knowledge of God and the Messiah according to His human lineage, but friends, the two-covenant theory is bogus. It is theological baloney. Nobody gets into heaven because they are descendants of Abraham. Every Jewish person, just like every Gentile, needs to believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, or they're going to miss heaven. That means that God expects you and me to do everything we can to tell them what nobody else has the courage to tell them.

Don't listen to all this high-sounding logic. Don't listen to all this rhetoric about being disrespectful. It is not disrespectful to share Jesus Christ with somebody in a courteous way. This is all rhetoric, friends, aimed at deflecting you and deflecting us from sharing a message with them that a lot of Jewish people want to hear and will respond to, and the rabbis have absolutely no way to stop it. That's all this is. It's rhetoric. Don't believe it.

May I close by saying that if you're here today and you're a Gentile and have never given your life to Jesus Christ in a real and personal way, listen folks, take a lesson from the Jews. They believed falsely that they could rely on being descendants of Abraham, and that would get them into heaven. God says in the Bible, "Uh-uh, not working." Well, you Gentiles rely on all kinds of other stuff. You rely on church membership and baptism and church attendance and sacraments and the rosary and penance and confession and last rites and your mother's Christian life and the Bible that sits on your shelf, and somehow you think that's gonna work. Folks, none of those things are working either. Remember what God said. He said the same solution is for everybody. "If we confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and we believe in our heart God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved, for there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, that's the person that will be delivered." I'm just telling you, friends. I'll shoot straight with you. If God is not going to let Jews into heaven on any other basis, He definitely ain't gonna let

you Gentiles in on any other basis. (laughter) I'm telling you the truth; this is the only way it happens right here.

Now next week we're going to continue in this series on theological errors that are being fostered on the American public. Next week the title of my message is "So What's the Big Deal About Homosexuality?" You don't want to miss next week. Let's pray.

Lord, thanks for talking to us today about truth. You know there's a lot of rhetoric out there, and there's a lot of public relations efforts out there aimed at getting us off the simple message of the Bible that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. Lord, I pray that You would remind us today where the beam is so we can stay on it, that You would keep us true to that beam, and that as a result of believing that, You would grant us a new motivation and a new excitement about sharing Christ because we understand that's the only hope anybody has, Jewish or Gentile. Father, send us out into this city as missionaries every single day, knowing we carry the only message in the universe that can change people's eternal destiny and transform their lives until they get there. Give us boldness and grant that we might not be ashamed, but that we might share the Word of God, the message of Christ, courteously but that we might share it courageously with the people of this city. Use our efforts beyond our wildest dreams to shake, rattle and roll this city for Christ, and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.